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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 9, 2008

In Today's Papers

EU Officials on AKP Closure Case, Turkey's EU Reforms
All papers report in Brussels on Tuesday, EU officials urged Ankara to amend article 301 of the penal code and to continue with EU harmonization reforms. EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana warned that attempts to ban the ruling AK party could have "grave consequences" for Turkey's EU bid. Solana told the European Parliament yesterday banning a party was "not something normal" in a democracy. EU Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso said the latest incidents show it won't be possible for the EU to give Turkey a date for full membership. EU Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn stressed that the EU entry process was a "guarantee" for preserving democracy and secularism in Turkey. Joost Lagendijk, co-chairman of Turkey-EU joint parliamentary commission, welcomed the attempt to change article 301, and noted that the reforms planned by the Turkish government would end the ambiguity in article 301. Under the headline, "Closing Down the AKP Would be Disaster," Yeni Safak quotes EP Socialist Group Vice-President Hannes Swoboda as saying banning the AKP would "paralyze democracy in Turkey."

Mainstream Milliyet warns in a front-page editorial the delay in EU reforms has raised questions regarding the willingness of Turkey to join the EU. The paper says the criticism of the European Commission over the AKP closure suit deserves respect. Turkey's move back towards the EU should be seen in a positive light and the EU delegation's visit should be.

Editorial Commentary on AKP Closure Case; Turkey-EU

"Chaos Engineering"

Mustafa Unal wrote in Islamist-leaning Zaman (4/9): "More democracy is the remedy for countering non-democratic efforts. The effort to change Turkish Penal Code 301 is a good step for eliminating obstacles to freedom of thought. Even though the proposed changes are not good enough to fully meet expectations, it can still be an interim solution to the problem. The ruling AKP decided to go ahead

with a comprehensive democratization package instead of minimal constitutional changes. Once the content of the package is finalized, the AKP will seek reconciliation with the parties represented in the parliament. Given the atmosphere in both the MHP and the CHP, we can conclude that reconciliation will be a very hard task for the AKP to achieve. Neither Baykal nor Bahceli seem to be in favor of reconciliation, even though this was originally CHP rhetoric as Baykal used to call on PM Erdogan to exert efforts to reconcile. The upcoming debate over a democratization package will be like a litmus test for the CHP on reconciliation. The AKP will proceed on its own and seek a referendum if the opposition does not give support for this ongoing effort. The ideal formula would be to find a way to these solve problems with a collaboration of government and opposition parties. Democratization should be winning over chaos, and chaos engineers should be left jobless."

"Ankara Waits for Barroso"

Murat Yetkin wrote in liberal-intellectual Radikal (4/9): "Barroso will be the second president of the EU Commission to visit Turkey. He comes to Ankara at a very critical time, and his visit provides two important messages to both Europe and to Turkey. EU Commission President Manuel Barroso has always defended Turkey's rights as a candidate before the anti-Turkey lobbyists in Europe. He has supported the idea that Turkey's negotiations with the EU should be dealt within a full membership context instead of privileged partnership. With this visit, he gives an open message to Turkey opponents: that Turkey deserves to be and should be a full member once conditions are all met. And his message to Turkey will be going to every official or institution he meets: 'we, the EU Commission, are supporting Turkey's full membership negotiations. However, do not expect it to happen without meeting all of the conditions.' In other words, Barroso will underline that the EU will not bend the rules of the game just because Turkey has some

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political, geographical, economical and cultural peculiarities. The fact that the ruling AKP has suddenly initiated some EU reforms after doing almost nothing in the last two years means that the messages from EU circles must have played a role. It is obvious that nobody will open the doors of EU to save the AKP for the sake of democracy unless and until Turkey fully complies with full membership requirements."

Erdogan, Baykal, Bahceli Address Party Groups

All papers report Prime Minister Erdogan told his ruling AKP lawmakers Tuesday his government was determined to protect the interests of all voters, including the ones who did not vote for the AKP in the last elections. Erdogan said the AKP was the "guarantee" of Turkey's unity. Mainstream Vatan notes the similarities between these comments and the Prime Minister's message following the victory of his party in July 22 elections. Opposition CHP leader Deniz Baykal lashed out at Erdogan for "complaining" about the AKP closure case to Vice President Dick Cheney during a meeting between the two leaders last month. Baykal said if Erdogan "did complain to the vice president of a foreign country, he deserves the worst punishment." Opposition far right MHP leader Devlet Bahceli said that the place to overcome the crisis is "not the corridors of the EU but the Turkish Parliament." Bahceli warned the AKP-backed constitutional reforms package would "pull Turkey into an environment of conflict."

Police Seize Hand Grenades at Bus Terminal in Istanbul

All papers report five grenades, three bomb fuses and 76 Kalashnikov bullets were found by the police at Istanbul's inter-city bus terminal in Bayrampasa in a bus coming from the eastern city of Malatya. The serial numbers of the grenades had been erased. Leftist Taraf says the grenades belong to a shadowy "counter-guerrilla" organization. Mainstream Sabah recalls that similar grenades were used in attacks against Cumhuriyet daily in Istanbul last year.

Fried Makes 'Complimentary' Remarks on Turkey

Hurriyet, Radikal, Zaman and others report on Tuesday, Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Dan Fried made

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"complimentary remarks" about Turkey to Turkish and Greek reporters at the Foreign Press Center in Washington. Islamist-oriented Zaman quotes Fried as saying, "Turkey had an active role in missile defense issues at the formal NATO meetings, as well as behind the scenes." Fried noted he has "learned a lot from Turkish colleagues who had strong advice." Fried also mentioned the UN's Lynn Pascoe recent visit to Cyprus, and now there is perhaps a true opportunity for progress on the divided island.

TV News:
NTV

Domestic News

- The head of the Diyarbakir Bar Association, Sezgin Tanrikulu, walked out of a meeting with Prime Minister Erdogan when the PM accused him of "lying" over the lack of Kurdish education and language rights in southeast Turkey, and for acting like a "spokesman of the PKK."
- Prosecutor sets free 33 suspects taken into custody in connection with the turmoil in Akdeniz (Mediterranean) University in Antalya.
- Former lawmaker Turan Comez has been expelled from the AKP.

International News

- The top US commander in Iraq, General David Petraeus, recommended a 45-day pause in withdrawals of US troops from Iraq.

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- The White House warned Iran risked further isolation and new international sanctions after refusing to comply with UN Security Council resolutions over its nuclear program.
- The Kosovo parliament is set to hold an extraordinary session Wednesday to adopt a new constitution.

WILSON